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THE HISTORIC COMPROMISE AND ITS FUTURE, (U)
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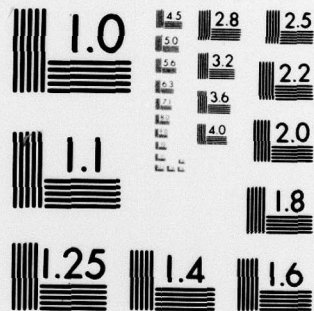
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10 Sidney Tarrow

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CONFERENCE ON ITALY
OCTOBER 2, 1975

Summary Remarks

6 The Historic Compromise and its Future

1. Is the historic compromise just around the corner in Italy? The question may be divided into three parts:

A. Will the vote for the Left, and particularly for the PCI, continue to climb?

B. What will be the strategies of the other major actors in the next year and one-half?

C. At what point under these conditions will the PCI turn its general theme of historic compromise into a concrete bid for joining a coalition government?

A. Among the conditions which led to a large increase in the vote for the left in June, 1975, some were trend-conditions and others were more expressly linked to the current situation:

Among the trend conditions were:

- A decline in the effects of religion on voting;
- The disproportionate vote of younger cohorts of voters for the left, while older, more conservative cohorts leave the voting pool;
- A greater balance between men and women in voting for the Left, which appears to have reversed the long-standing preference of Italian women for the Democrazia Cristiana;
- The decline of the Catholic subculture and its organizations.

Other conditions appear to have been more linked to the current situation:

- The once-only expansion of the electorate to include 18-21 year olds;
- The severe economic crisis and high rate of unemployment and inflation;
- The series of strategic errors on the part of Secretary Fanfani of the DC which preceded the elections.

Moreover, although the Left gained substantially in areas of traditional Catholic subculture (the Veneto, eastern Lombardy), its gains were very small in most of the South and were moderate in its traditional bastions in Central Italy. It is not clear, moreover, how much of the PCI's urban gains in places like Rome and Naples can be translated into permanent supporters and how much came from volatile protest voters who may have come from the extreme Right, from among abstainers in previous elections, or from new voters who find themselves on the labor market for the first time, but who are by no means embedded in a marxist subculture. In other words, at least a portion of the gains of the Left had to come from volatile elements, and not from the stable sources of organized voters who can be depended upon in the future.

B. Assuming the vote for the Left, and for the PCI in particular, continues to climb in the 1977 legislative elections, what will be the strategies of the three major actors?

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Oddly enough, since it was the major loser, much depends on the course the DC follows in the next year. It has learned that factional disarray and policy diffuseness can have serious costs. But what can it do to reduce its factional bickering and elaborate a new and more coordinated policy line over the next year? On the factional question, there is some evidence of a new coalition emerging around Aldo Moro on the basis of a revived Catholic progressivism. In the other hand, the forces in the party working for a transformation in the direction of a neoliberal conservative party are still very strong. With the ideological space to the Left occupied by the Communists and Socialists, they will argue, and with the recent losses of the PLI and neo-fascists to profit from, the logical direction for the party to move will be that taken by the German CDU and French Gaullists in the 1960's: towards becoming a modern party of free enterprise.

What will the Socialists do between now and 1977 to assure their own position between the two mammoth actors of Italian politics? The recent election told them that only moderate gains can be expected if the PSI remains visibly in the shadow of the Christian Democrats, as they have been for most of the period since 1962. This would lead to a strategy of opposition, at least until after the election. The recent expansion of left-wing administrations on the local and regional level has begun to attract numerous middle class elements into the party, particularly from among the newly deconcentrated bureaucracies of the central ministries and from disenchanted Christian Democrats. But, the electoral impetus to fight the next election from a more advantageous position in opposition may lead to a PSI exit from the government after the next party congress during a period when its new middle class recruits have not yet gained enough responsibility in the party to shift its balance to the Center.

How will the PSI's future be affected by the three major possibilities for the DC's internal evolution?

First, the DC as progressive Catholic party will threaten the PSI most and leave it dangerously exposed to a PCI-DC alliance above its head. If this is the DC's direction, the PSI will have to compete in the 1977 from a position further to the Left: (i.e., in opposition) and may return to dependence on the PCI.

Second, the DC as a neo-liberal party leaves space for the PSI to gain votes from centrist voters in 1977, possibly also from opposition, but conceivably from within the coalition, provided it can maintain an image of independence among the voters.

Third, the DC failing to solve its factional problems or to evolve a coherent policy stance will leave the PSI roughly in the same ambivalent position it has been in for ten years, and increase the chances for permanent schism.

If the DC should go into the 1977 elections in the same state of disintegration in which it currently finds itself, the gains for the Left will continue. Since the DC's internal confusion will be matched by that of the PSI, this situation will increase the chances that a leftwing gain will

disproportionately benefit the PCI. The bargaining power of the Communists must increase rapidly vis-a-vis both prospective partners as a result.

Should the DC go into the 1977 elections with a clear mandate for progressive Catholicism, the results are difficult to predict, but might well cost the Socialists votes rather than the Communists, thus leaving the two major actors in a two-person game against one another.

Should the DC evolve in the direction of the CDU and UDR before it, the chances are that it would pick up votes on the right and lose voters in the center who the PSI and the minor parties of the center-left might be in a better position to pick up than the Communists.

A DC as a modern conservative party would therefore have the best chance of increasing the total number of votes in the classical arc of the centro-sinistra parties, but might not lead to a revival of the classical centro-sinistra because of the changed political situation. A "progressive" DC might do little more than shift votes from the PSI to itself while the PCI continued to gain. And an unchanged DC would guarantee a continuation of 1975's electoral trends.

C. The evolution of the DC will be the most direct influence on the PCI's pre-election and post-election strategy. If the debate in the Christian Democracy is won by Moro and the "popularizers", the likelihood is that the PCI will take this as evidence of the success of its current strategy and attempt to enter the government. If it is won by the "neoliberals," the PCI will have to hold off still further, hoping the new DC strategy fails electorally. If neither coalition coalesces within the DC, the chances are that that party will remain unable to make effective policy and that the gains for the Left will continue, in an air of political uncertainty and economic crisis. Continued dispersion and policy confusion in the DC are the best formula for a repetition of June 15, 1975.

2. In discussing alternatives to the compromesso storico, it is useful to diaggregate the concept:

1. a compromesso storico organico with the PCI in the government is most likely if the DC shifts to the Left and loses votes to the Communists or to the Right or both;

2. a compromesso storico parziale, with the Communists outside the coalition, but with their accord essential for basic economic policies is most likely if the DC fails to solve its internal problems but refuses to allow the Communists in. In this case, the Socialists become the swing factor, translating Communist demands into acceptable coalition policies and attempting to sit on the fence between government and opposition.

3. a compromesso storico clientelistico, with the Communists excluded from both policy and participation in government, but given a share of patronage and greater resources for their regional bastions, becomes most likely if the DC becomes a strong modern conservative party, and if both it and the PSI gain enough support in 1977 to continue some sort of mez-zadria with "consultation" of the PCI.

4. A classical center-left government is likely only in the eventuality of an economic upturn, strong reverses for the Communists, and the PSI in the

hands of its most reformist elements. All three of these happening at once are highly unlikely.

5. A centrist government. Most unlikely of all.

The possibilities of a compromesso storico organico (with the PCI in the government) are greatest with the PSI weakest, since the PCI could not effectively hope to influence the government from outside if its Socialist ally had little influence from inside the coalition. The best chance for a compromesso storico parziale (with the PCI influencing the government from outside) comes with a strong and confident PSI emerging from the 1977 elections with an enlarged electorate. The best chance for a renewed centro-sinistra comes from a joint PCI and PSI loss and a gain for the DC and the minor parties of the center-left. Because of the unlikelihood of the DC pulling its ship together in time for the 1977 election and the current disintegration in the PSDI, the chances of this are not strong. It follows that any other classical formula like a centrist government, is equally unlikely.

Two other possibilities should not be totally discounted.

6. First, an unchanged balance of the vote in the 1977 elections may leave the DC encouraged to attempt to hold on to power, the PSI unwilling to return to the government and the PCI unable to enter it. This could lead to an indeterminate period of minority government by the DC-PRI or the DC alone until new elections could be called. Such a government, in all likelihood with a large proportion of "technicians", would follow a LaMalfa-like economic policy and retain the same foreign policy as in the past, but might be extremely unstable.

7. Secondly, a continued standoff in 1977, with the DC in the hands of a conservative coalition could lead to a turnabout in the PCI's historic compromise strategy. Thus far, no such turnabout is evident, although there are signs of uneasiness from other Communist parties and from some elements at the base of the PCI. The experience of having governing responsibility for some of the most ungovernable cities in Italy may also increase the frustration in the PCI with what may seem a long and thankless course. Since the PSI has always had its doubts about its role in a PCI-DC entente, a weakened PSI in 1977 may add its weight against the current strategy. Thus there is some chance -- although a small one -- of a reversal of the PCI's strategy in the direction of a popular front strategy of a more classical type.

3. The problem with the DC pulling itself together is that it would have to make hard policy choices to do so, a choice would inevitably cost votes on the left or the right and risk a schism that would put an end to Catholic domination of the Italian state.

4. The Church is far less willing (or able) to act as the organizational infrastructure of the DC than in the past. The military, to all accounts, is heavily divided. Activation of rightwing elements in political life would inevitably trigger a polarization of the military, with troop deployments, etc. resulting from this. A situation alla portoghese would then be very likely. Industry seems increasingly tempted by the strategy of direct negotiations on social problems with the unions and impressed by the ability

of the Left to make policy in the areas that it controls. Private industry and the Left have increasingly converged during 1974 and 75 in their critique of the public sector.

5. This is a question to which I have devoted too much time and thought to answer rapidly. For a short statement of my position, I attach a recent paper on the Italian political system. Also see the conclusions to Donald Blackmer and Sidney Tarrow (eds.) Communism in Italy and France (Princeton, November, 1975).

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